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Issue Paper THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION SITUATION OF JEWS August 1998

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Table of Contents

[MAP](#)

1. [INTRODUCTION](#)

[1.1 DEMOGRAPHY](#)

2. [REVIVAL OF JEWISH CULTURE](#)

3. [ANTI-SEMITISM](#)

[3.1 EXTREMIST AND NATIONALIST GROUPS](#)

[3.2 ANTI-SEMITIC VIOLENCE](#)

4. [STATE PROTECTION](#)

5. [IMPACT OF THE 1997 RELIGION LAW](#)

6. [FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS](#)

[REFERENCES](#)

MAP

See original.

Source: *Facts on File*. 1993. *C.I.S. and Eastern Europe on File*, sections 5.17, 5.18.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Issue Paper provides information on anti-Semitism and the situation of Jews in Russia in 1997 and the first five months of 1998. It updates and adds to information contained in a number of past reports produced by the Research Directorate. For background information, historical context and for details on events prior to 1997, please refer to the November 1994 Question and Answer series paper entitled *Jews in Russia and the Soviet Union: Chronology 1727-1 January 1992* and the following Responses to Information Requests: RUS27664.E, RUS27663.E, RUS27479.E 1997 and RUS27461.E (August 1997).

This Issue Paper should be read in conjunction with *Anti-Semitism in the Former Soviet Union: Report 1995-1997*, a Union of Councils for Soviet Jews (UCSJ) report. This report, and its update entitled *Report on Anti-Semitism, Political Extremism and Persecution of Religious Groups in Russia: April-December 1997*, are available at Regional Documentation Centres. For reference, the UCSJ also maintains a Website <<http://www.fsmonitor.com>> intended to serve as a clearinghouse for up-to-date news on the situation of Jews in the former Soviet Union (FSU). Please also consult the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) February 1998 report entitled *Country Reports Winter 1997-98: Inside the Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* and the 1996 Institute for Jewish Policy Research and American Jewish Committee publication *Antisemitism World Report 1996*, both of which are available at Regional Documentation Centres.

1.1 DEMOGRAPHY

Russia may have the world's third largest Jewish population—estimates range from 500,000 to 1,000,000^[1] (*Country Reports 1997* 1998, 1266; NCSJ Feb. 1998, np; UCSJ May 1997, 35; *The Independent* 7 Mar. 1998). Approximately 50 per cent of Russian Jews live in Moscow and St. Petersburg; 200,000-500,000 Jews live in Moscow alone (NCSJ Feb. 1998, np; UCSJ May 1997, 35; AFP 24 Apr. 1998; *The Independent* 20 Apr. 1998; *The Moscow Times* 11 Mar. 1998). The rest are spread across various regions and cities throughout the Russian Federation (NCSJ Feb. 1998, np; UCSJ May 1997, 35).

Jews from the Caucasus are steadily arriving in Moscow and thousands of Jews from other regions of the FSU are also moving to the Russian capital (*The Moscow Times* 11 Mar. 1998). A Moscow rabbi estimated in March 1998 that there are 50,000 Jews from southern Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia living in Moscow (ibid.). It is these Caucasus Jews who are fueling the current Jewish cultural revival in Russia (see section 2) (ibid.). Émigrés from Israel who left Russia in the past decade are also beginning to return to the city (*The Independent* 20 Apr. 1998; *The Moscow Times* 11 Mar. 1998). At the same time, Jews continue to leave Moscow for Israel, albeit in smaller numbers than in previous years; 1,120 Jewish Muscovites immigrated to Israel in 1997 (ibid.; AFP 24 Apr. 1998). According to an AFP article, the quality of life in Moscow and St. Petersburg has become increasingly appealing, slowing down the rate of *aliya* (the migration of Jews to Israel) (ibid.). Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi, claims that emigration has all but stopped because of political stability and lucrative economic prospects (DPA 12 Oct. 1997). The NCSJ notes, however, that the reduction in numbers of Jews leaving Russia may reflect the reduced number of potential émigrés that remain in the country (Oct. 1997).

NOTE

[1] Estimates of the number of Jews in the Russian Federation vary widely. For example, the *Anti-Semitism World Report 1996* gives a population of 500,000 (1996, 206) while *The Independent* estimates 1,000,000 Jews live in Russia (7 Mar. 1998).

[\[back\]](#)

2. REVIVAL OF JEWISH CULTURE

In its 1998 report the NCSJ states that:

for most of the past decade, a revival of public Jewish communal life has been taking place in Russia as Jewish communities work to reestablish religious, social, and cultural life, and provide for the education and welfare needs of the populace. The focal point of the Jewish renaissance is Moscow, where almost all international Jewish organizations are represented. At the core of religious revival is the over 100-year-old Moscow Choral Synagogue that accommodates and organizes many religious, academic, and social events and programmes. Additionally, [the] Chabad Lubavitch [movement] operates two synagogues in Moscow ... Each of the synagogues sponsors an array of religious programs including yeshivas, day schools, and supplementary programs (np).

According to Eugene Weiner, a manager with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the revival of Jewish culture in Russia is a significant development in the 20th century history of the world's Jews (*Christian Science Monitor* 28 Jan. 1997). Its significance can be ranked along with the establishment of the American Jewish community, the founding of Israel and the Holocaust (ibid.). Tancred Golenpolsky, the founder of the *International Jewish Newspaper*, calls the Jewish national revival in Russia very strong (*The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997). Aleksandr Osovtsov, a Deputy Chairman of the Russian Jewish Congress, notes that the revival of Jewish culture is not strictly limited to Moscow and St. Petersburg; it is taking place throughout the country (3 June 1998).

Evidence of a Jewish cultural, religious and social revival in Russia has been well reported in the international press. More than 100 Jewish organizations operate in Moscow (*The Independent* 20 Apr. 1998). There are seven Jewish secondary schools, four Jewish institutes of higher learning, two yeshivas, numerous Jewish kindergartens and Sunday schools (*The Moscow Times* 11 Mar. 1998; *The Independent* 7 Mar. 1998; ibid., 20 Apr. 1998; *Christian Science Monitor* 28 Jan. 1997; *International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997). Russian universities teach Jewish culture and history in Hebrew and Yiddish to both Jewish and Russian students (*Christian Science Monitor* 28 Jan. 1997). Jewish welfare organizations exist, as do several kosher restaurants, orthodox and non-orthodox singles clubs and Jewish theatre and choirs (*The Moscow Times* 11 Mar. 1998; *The Independent* 20 Apr. 1998; *The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997).

According to an article in *The Independent*:

the resurgence of Jewish culture is everywhere evident. Promising Jewish writers—who once had to type out their work furtively as 'samizdat' [underground publications]—are now widely published. The Shalom Theater stages musical performances with Yiddish lyrics. Displays of Davidic dances ... have returned to St. Petersburg (20 Apr. 1998).

Russian Jews are now in a position to fund Jewish programmes, schools and projects themselves; until recently funding for such projects chiefly came from "some wealthy American or other millionaire who would want to provide money for a Jewish kindergarten" or other projects (*The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997).

The UCSJ reports that there has been "somewhat of a Jewish revival" in Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union (May 1997, 35).

Many small Jewish institutions have been formed in the past few years, over fifty in Moscow alone. Overall, Russian Jewish life is not well coordinated and is dispersed around the country, though the Russia Vaad, a grassroots umbrella organization, has united many Jewish groups since the Gorbachev period. The Israeli government also has a network of *aliya* centres and Jewish camps. The Chasid [Chabad] Lubavitch movement maintains an extensive network of rabbis, synagogues and schools (ibid.).

The UCSJ report expresses concern, however, over a higher-than-65 per cent intermarriage rate and over the fact that few Russian Jews participate in Jewish communal life and many know little of Judaism (May 1997, 36). A *Christian Science Monitor* report agrees with this assessment, reporting that:

Jewish life was so heavily suppressed in the Soviet Union that most Jewish people grew up without contact with Jewish tradition, public life, or religion. With little cultural or religious identity, as much as 75 per cent of Jews have married non-Jews, threatening to dissolve Jewishness into the larger populations of Russians or Ukrainians (28 Jan. 1997).

According to the *International Herald Tribune*, in addition to a cultural revival Russian Jews are experiencing a political renaissance; there were more Jews in high government positions in 1997 than there have been since 1917 (16 Apr. 1997). For example, Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko and Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov both have Jewish ancestry (*New York Times* 15 May 1998; *International Herald Tribune* 16 April 1997). Former Finance Minister Alexander Livshits is Jewish and Grigori Yavlinsky, a leading reformer, is half-Jewish (ibid.). Jewish business moguls Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky reportedly have significant influence with President Yeltsin (*The Independent* 20 Apr. 1998).

3. ANTI-SEMITISM

Despite the existence of the Jewish cultural and religious revival, Jewish leaders note a "two-facedness" of Russian Jewish life in the late 1990s (*The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997; *The Christian Science Monitor* 28 Jan. 1997; *International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997). Simultaneous to the rebirth of Jewish culture, since the end of the Soviet Union there has also been a rise in anti-Semitism (ibid.; *The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997; *The Christian Science Monitor* 28 Jan. 1997). Eugene Weiner, quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor*, reports that "life in Russia for Jews today is a mix of the positive and the negative. On the one hand, Russians built a synagogue on their pre-eminent monument in Moscow, Victory Park, to the defeat of the Nazis in World War II" (ibid.). On the other hand, Weiner points out that "you can go to any newspaper stand and pick up the most vile threats and expressions of anti-Semitism" (ibid.). An article in the *International Herald Tribune* observes that the "paradox of anti-Semitism in Russia today is that in most ways, life for Jews has never been better" (16 Apr. 1997).

A survey of Jews in St. Petersburg was carried out in 1995 by California's Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal, the Harold Light Jewish Centre for Human Rights in St. Petersburg, and the Nathan Perlmutter Institute for Jewish Advocacy, located in Massachusetts (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 2). The results of the survey showed that 40 per cent of respondents had been victims of some form of anti-Semitism (ibid.). Some 54 per cent had been called anti-Semitic names, 15 per cent had been physically threatened because of their Jewish identity and 14 per cent claimed to have been victims of

anti-Semitic vandalism or job-related discrimination (ibid.). A 1997 survey conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation, based in Moscow, indicated that 6 per cent of the 1,500 adults surveyed "have a positive attitude toward neo-Nazi groups" (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 1-2). Thirty-six per cent of respondents stated that they had "no definite attitude towards neo-Nazi groups" (ibid.). Fifteen per cent stated that they encountered neo-Nazis in their everyday lives, ten per cent reported having seen neo-Nazi symbols in public places and five per cent stated that they had seen or read neo-Nazi publications (ibid.). According to surveys done by Lev Gudkov, a sociologist who has been studying anti-Semitic sentiment in Russia since 1990, 6-10 per cent of Russians "harbour aggressive hatred toward Jews while up to 15 per cent more are passively anti-Semitic and 30 per cent are selectively so—for example, enjoying work with Jewish colleagues but fretting over the perceived increase of Jews' influence in government and culture" (AP 8 June 1998). Gudkov believes, however, that anti-Semitism has been gradually lessening in Russia, although other forms of xenophobia, such as a hatred of people from the Caucasus, is growing (ibid.).

Other sources report that since the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, economic hardship, social upheaval and the eagerness of some politicians to exploit the resentments of many Russians have contributed to a growth of anti-Semitism in Russia (*International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997; UCSJ Jan. 1998, 1, 3; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997). Tancred Golenpolsky observes that there is now no shame in being openly Jewish in Russia and, as a result, there has been a correspondingly negative response against the renewal of Jewish culture among many Russians (*International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997). Both the UCSJ and a *Toronto Star* article draw a correlation between the economic, political and social situation in 1990s Russia to post World War I Germany (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 1; *The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997).

Several sources report that anti-Semitism is a strong force in Russia, adding that it has grown dramatically in the past seven or eight years (Proshechkin 3 June 1998; Osovtsov 3 June 1998; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; UCSJ May 1997 36-37;). *Country Reports 1997* states that "Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination. ...Anti-Semitic themes continued to figure prominently in hundreds of extremist publications, and some Russian politicians made anti-Semitic remarks. These public statements contributed to a general atmosphere of anti-Semitism" (1998, 1266). Alexander Gelman, a Moscow playwright and political correspondent, states that the increase in anti-Semitism since the fall of the Soviet Union has led to a lack of confidence and feeling of insecurity among Russia's Jews (*The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997; see also *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997).

According to Evgeny Proshechkin, chairman of the Moscow Anti-Fascist Centre, anti-Semitism is especially strong in the Northern Caucasus, Stavropol and Krasnodar regions, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Voronezh (3 June 1998). Aleksandr Osovtsov believes Moscow, Orel and Krasnodar Krai, a region along the northern Black Sea coast, are among the most "troublesome" regions (3 June 1998).

In December 1996 Nikolai Kondratenko, a man reported to have close links to communists and nationalists headed by Gennady Zyuganov, was elected governor of Krasnodar Krai; according to *The Independent*, he is a "racist" (7 Mar. 1998). William Cohen, a member of the UCSJ Board of Directors, also indicates that in his opinion the leaders of Krasnodar Krai, are an "anti-reform, racist and anti-Semitic coalition of Communists, Cossacks and Nationalists. This repressive alliance has moved rapidly to impose Soviet-style rule ... including eliminating non-Russians from government jobs and employing terror tactics aimed at cleansing the region of Jews, Armenians and other 'Caucasus' people" (Cohen 4 Dec. 1997; see also *The Independent* 7 Mar. 1998).

In February 1998 Kondratenko created a controversy when, during a speech to a youth forum, he

allegedly made "61 brazenly anti-Semitic remarks" (*The Independent* 7 Mar. 1998; see also *News from UCSJ* 20 Feb. 1998). The governor's speech was reprinted on the front page of *Izvestiya* in March; outraged Jewish organizations immediately began to consider legal action (*The Independent* 7 Mar. 1998). In a letter to President Yeltsin, Russian Jewish leaders asked him to put a stop to fanatical fascism and demanded that Kondratenko face a thorough public and legal review (*Express-Chronicle* 21 Mar. 1998). In a statement provided to the media, the executive committee of the Congress of Russian Intelligentsia demanded that Kondratenko be fired and that criminal proceedings be brought against him (ITAR-TASS 11 Mar. 1998; *ibid.*, 9 Apr. 1998). The Krasnodar prosecutor's office decided, however, not to bring charges against Kondratenko (ITAR-TASS 9 Apr. 1998; UCSJ Action Alert 1 May 1998). The prosecutor's office stated that:

the governor presented his explanation to regional prosecutors, firmly denying the charges of anti-Semitism.... After reviewing newspaper reports and the Intelligentsia's Congress' statement, the prosecutors ruled there was no cause for a criminal suit (ITAR-TASS 9 Apr. 1998).

Estimates about the number of neo-fascist, extremist and anti-Semitic publications produced and distributed in Russia vary widely from 100 to 300 (UCSJ Jan. 1998 26-27; *Antisemitism World Report* 1996 1996, 210; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; *International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997). The majority of these publications are of poor quality and have a limited readership (*ibid.*). However, Mark Krasnoselsky, the director of the Russian Confederation of Jewish Organizations, estimates that these newspapers may have a combined press run of several million (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997). According to Krasnoselsky, some anti-Semitic publications list the names and addresses of Jewish journalists and writers and, as a result, several journalists have received harassing telephone calls and threats (*ibid.*). More popular newspapers, such as and the pro-communist weekly newspaper, *Zavtra*, also often espouse bigotry and chauvinism (*International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997; Lvov 27 May 1998; *Transitions* Aug. 1997, 74). *Zavtra* claims a weekly circulation of approximately 100,000 (*ibid.*). A report written by Leonid Lvov, the director of the UCSJ St. Petersburg Human Rights Bureau, states that "the editors of these newspapers [*Sovetskaya Rossiya*, *Pravda* and *Zavtra*] proceed from the fact that they consider Jews to be the entire cause of the Russian catastrophe. They believe that all political leaders not to their liking are Jews" (Lvov 27 May 1998; see also *International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997)^[2].

3.1 EXTREMIST AND NATIONALIST GROUPS

Proshechkin notes that anti-Semites can be found throughout society; from street "hooligans" to regional governors (3 June 1998). However, overt or extreme anti-Semitism exists primarily at the fringes of society, where it has been growing since the mid-1980s (*International Herald Tribune* 16 Apr. 1997). Estimates of the number of nationalist, fascist and neo-Nazi groups existing in Russia range from 50 to over 120 and, according to the UCSJ, all these groups advocate xenophobia and anti-Semitism (UCSJ May 1997, 37; *ibid.*, Jan. 1998, 11; Jan. 1998, 11; *Antisemitism World Report* 1996 1996, 207; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; see also Proshechkin 3 June 1998). *Antisemitism World Report* 1996 states that by 1996 most of these extremist organizations had "recently shifted away from targeting Jews to targeting natives of the Caucasus area; and they had at their disposal tens of thousands of fighters" (1996, 207). The same source reports that it is difficult to keep track of many of the extremist and nationalist organizations as "on an almost daily basis [they] are springing up, splitting, forming and abandoning alliances, and frequently changing their names" (*ibid.*). Referring specifically to skinhead groups, Alexander Ossipov, a programme officer with the Moscow-based Memorial Human Rights Centre, reports that there are dozens of such groups active around Russia,

with a few thousand members in Moscow^[3], Yaroslavl, Vladivostok, St. Petersburg and other cities (May 1998). The targets of most violent extremist and skinhead attacks are members of visible minorities, such as African and Asian students, forced migrants and dark-skinned merchants from the Caucasus (ibid.). According to Ossipov, skinhead ideology in Russia is a "vague and eclectic mixture of extreme rightist and racist views imported from the West" (May 1998).

Most skinhead groups are not politically active although some have links to the Russian National Unity (RNU) Party, the Nationalist Bolshevik Party and the National Republican Party of Russia (Ossipov May 1998). The RNU, the National Bolshevik Party, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party have been classified as the strongest and most active right-wing groups and parties in Russia (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 11-14; Osovtsov 3 June 1998; Proshechkin 3 June 1998; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; *Country Reports* 1997 1998, 1266; *The Independent* 7 Mar. 1998; Cohen 4 Dec. 1997).

The Communist Party, led by Gennady Zyuganov, won 22.3 per cent of the vote in the December 1995 parliamentary elections, winning 157 seats of the 450 seats in the Russian parliament, the Duma^[4] (NCSJ Feb. 1998; *Antisemitism World Report* 1996 1996, 205.; *People in Power* 1 May 1998, 156). The Liberal Democratic Party, an extreme right-wing nationalist party, secured 11.2 per cent of the vote, the second largest percentage of votes won in the election (*Antisemitism World Report* 1996 1996, 205; NCSJ Feb. 1998). The Liberal Democratic Party controls 51 seats in the Duma (*Political Handbook of the World* 1997 1997, 706).

The openly anti-Semitic RNU, a militant off-shoot of Pamyat, was founded in 1990 and is led by Alexander Barkashov (Cohen 4 Dec. 1997; *Political Handbook of the World* 1997 1997, 706). Five sources list the RNU as either the largest, most powerful or most active anti-Semitic organization (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 11; Osovtsov 3 June 1998; Proshechkin 3 June 1998; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; Ossipov May 1998). According to Cohen, the RNU's activities and power have increased in recent years; over 1,000 people from 57 different regions attended its 1997 party congress^[5] (4 Dec. 1997). The RNU estimates its own membership at between 2,000 to 70,000 (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 11-12; ibid., May 1997, 39; *Antisemitism World Report* 1996 1996, 208; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997). The platform of the RNU centres on the belief that there is a world-wide Jewish conspiracy against Russia and maintains that "ethnic Russians must assert themselves as the ruling people of the Russian Federation to protect Russians from lethal internal and external enemies" (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 11; see also ibid., May 1997, 108;). Barkashov has referred to the RNU as a "neo-Nazi" group (ibid., Jan. 1998, 11). The RNU claims to have 350 branches across Russia (UCSJ May 1997, 108; *Antisemitism World Report* 1996 1996, 208), and it reportedly has particularly close links to local government officials in Orel and Stavropol (UCSJ, Jan. 1998, 12).

3.2 ANTI-SEMITIC VIOLENCE

Country Reports 1997 states that "there were no reported incidents of major crimes or acts of intimidation linked to anti-Semitic groups or motives in 1997. No progress was reported in investigations of several incidents that occurred in 1996" (1998, 1266). In its update of events in the final six months of 1997, however, the UCSJ reports that "swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans have been seen on Metro walls, Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated, synagogues have been attacked, and three *kippah*-wearing Jews were beaten on the streets" (Jan. 1998, 3). Outlined below are several incidents from early 1998 that brought renewed attention to the existence of anti-Semitism in Russia. Additional 1998 reports of violent or destructive anti-Semitic incidents were not available in the documentation consulted by the Research Directorate.

On 13 May 1998 a bomb exploded at Moscow's Marina Roshcha Lubavitch Synagogue (*News from UCSJ* 14 May 1998; *The New York Times* 15 May 1998; ENI 20 May 1998; *Electronic Telegraph* 18 May 1998; AP 15 May 1998). Despite the severity of the blast, which destroyed an entire wall of the synagogue, only one or two persons suffered minor injuries (*News from UCSJ* 14 May 1998; *Electronic Telegraph* 18 May 1998; AP 15 May 1998). It was the third attack on the same synagogue in five years (*News from UCSJ* 14 May 1998; *The New York Times* 15 May 1998; ENI 20 May 1998; AP 15 May 1998).

An anonymous call to Moscow police accused the right-wing RNU of planting the bomb (Interfax 15 May 1998). RNU leader Aleksandr Barkashov denied the allegation, stating that the bombing was likely a "crudely planned provocation instigated by the 'victims' themselves" (ibid.). Barkashov went on to state that the RNU is "a public and political organization that does not engage in terrorist activity" (ibid.).

President Yeltsin declared the bombing a barbaric act and called for the swift punishment of those responsible and Moscow city officials pledged a thorough investigation (ENI 20 May 1998; *New York Times* 15 May 1998). A senior communist deputy and head of the Russian Parliament's Security Committee reportedly maintained that the synagogue attack may have in fact been a reaction to the "prominence" of Jews in the upper echelons of the current government (ibid.). According to this deputy the Russian government "is formed as if it had forgotten that there are talented people of different nationalities ... priority is bestowed on one nationality, Jews. Unfortunately, I do not preclude that there may be more explosions" (ibid.).

Also on 13 May 1998, over 140 graves were desecrated in a Jewish cemetery in Irkutsk, Siberia (ENI 20 May 1998; *Electronic Telegraph* 18 May 1998; AFP 13 May 1998). The grave stones were either completely destroyed, damaged or covered in swastikas and anti-Semitic rhetoric (*Electronic Telegraph* 18 May 1998). Several monuments in the same cemetery were vandalized in December 1997, and in March 1998 the guard house of a different Jewish cemetery in Irkutsk was set on fire and tombstones were vandalized (AFP 13 May 1998; *News from UCSJ* 17 June 1998).

Other incidents in early 1998 included a May subway attack on a young rabbi from Yaroslavl; the rabbi suffered a broken nose as a result of the incident (*The New York Times* 15 May 1998; see also Lvov 27 May 1998). On 14 March 1998 approximately 70 supporters of two left-wing groups, the Officers' Union and the National Bolshevik Party, some carrying red flags and shouting slogans such as "crushing the Jews means saving Russia", marched in Moscow (Interfax 14 Mar. 1998). In January 1998 Molotov cocktails destroyed two rooms of a Jewish day school in Nalchik, in the northern Caucasus (*News from UCSJ* 28 Jan. 1998). No one was injured in this attack and a Nalchik Jewish community leader reported that local officials "have been very supportive of the Jewish community [in the wake of the attack] and are 'very much involved in the investigation'" (ibid.).

On 19 May 1998 leaders of the Jewish, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Buddhist and Muslim faiths released a joint statement which condemned "terrorist acts" and the recent growth of sectarian and ethnic violence (ENI 20 May 1998; AFP 19 May 1998). The statement called for better protection of religious institutions and expressed deep concern over the increase of inter-ethnic conflicts across Russia (ibid.; ENI 20 May 1998). The leaders appealed to government and judicial authorities to halt the deterioration of ethnic relations in Russia and to protect society from ethnic conflict (ibid.).

NOTES

[2] Please see pages 26-27 of the January UCSJ report entitled *Report on Antisemitism, Political Extremism and Persecution of*

Religious Groups in Russia: April-December 1997, available at Regional Documentation Centres, for further information on manifestations of anti-Semitism in the Russian press. [\[back\]](#)

[3] The two main skinhead groups in Moscow are the Moscow Skinlegion and the Russian branch of the International Blood and Honour group (Ossipov May 1998). [\[back\]](#)

[4] "The Duma is a 450-member body, half of whose seats are filled by proportional representation from party lists obtaining a minimum of 5 percent of the vote and half from single-member constituencies" (*Political Handbook of the World 1997* 1997, 706). [\[back\]](#)

[5] For further information on the RNU and for descriptions of several other national and local extremist groups in Russia, please consult the May 1997 UCSJ publication entitled *Anti-Semitism in the Former Soviet Union: Report 1995-1997* and the UCSJ's January 1998 report entitled *Report on Antisemitism, Political Extremism and Persecution of Religious Groups in Russia: April-December 1997*. Both reports are available at Regional Documentation Centres. [\[back\]](#)

4. STATE PROTECTION

The following provisions are some of the legislative norms that govern protection of citizens' rights in Russia. According to Article 19(2) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation:

the state shall guarantee the equality of rights and liberties regardless of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, property or employment status, residence, attitude to religion, convictions, membership of public associations or any other circumstance. Any restrictions of the rights of citizens on social, racial, national, linguistic or religious grounds shall be forbidden (Blaustein May 1994, 6).

Article 13 of the Constitution prohibits the creation of organizations whose aims are to incite social, racial, national and religious strife (UCSJ May 1997, 26; Blaustein May 1994, 6). Article 29(2) bans propaganda that promotes the supremacy of a particular social, national or religious group, or language (UCSJ May 1997, 26). Russia's April 1995 anti-fascist law prohibits the use of "Nazi symbols in any form as insulting the feelings of multinational people and the memory of those who gave their lives in the Great Patriotic War [World War II]" (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 15,16). Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code prohibits "Acts directed [at] promoting the rise of national animosity and the insult of national dignity, carried out with using mass media" (*News from UCSJ* 10 Feb. 1998). These same acts, "if committed by violence or threat of violence, by a person while using his or her official position [or] by an organized group—are punished by imprisonment for a period of three to five years" (UCSJ May 1997, 26). Presidential Decree 310, passed on 23 March 1995, details "Measures to Ensure Coordinated Actions by Bodies of State Power in Combating Manifestations of Fascism and other Forms of Political Extremism in the Russian Federation" (ibid., Jan. 1998, 17; *Express-Chronicle* 21 Mar. 1998). In October 1997 President Yeltsin created the Presidential Commission to Fight Political Extremism (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 15; NCSJ Feb. 1998, np).

Proposed amendments to the Criminal Code that would have banned the "public justification of, approval of, extolling of, or denial of crimes committed by national-socialist or fascist regimes" were rejected by the Russian Duma in October 1997 (UCSJ Jan. 1998, 18). In March 1997 the Duma had also failed to adopt the third version of a bill that would ban fascist propaganda (ibid.; NCSJ Feb. 1998, np). In both of these cases communists and nationalists, who control a substantial number of seats in the Duma, were blamed for the defeat of the measures (ibid.; UCSJ Jan. 1998, 18). The bill to ban fascist propaganda was labeled a Zionist law by some members of the Duma (NCSJ Feb. 1998, np).

Several sources indicate that legislation currently in place to prevent fascism and protect minority

rights is not being fully enforced by police, local courts and governments (Proshechkin 3 June 1998; NCSJ Feb. 1998, np; UCSJ Jan. 1998, 15-19; *The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997; AP 15 May 1998; Lvov 27 May 1998; ITAR-TASS 11 Mar. 1998). The UCSJ states that national and local governments have been complicit in the failure of the Russian judicial system to prosecute anti-Semitic crimes and the UCSJ accuses the government of repeatedly failing to enforce legislation banning the activities of extremist groups and inflammatory anti-Semitic publications (Jan. 1998, 15; see also *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; AP 8 June 1998). According to the NCSJ, "legislation developed to protect minority rights and religious freedoms is not strictly enforced, creating an environment conducive to the spread of anti-Semitism and human rights abuses" (Feb. 1998, np). *Country Reports 1997* observes that Russian government officials have faced criticism for insufficient action to combat anti-Semitic acts (1998, 1266; see also AI 1 June 1998; HRW/H Feb. 1997 21-22). Tancred Golenpolsky remarked that "once we had anti-Semitism imposed from above. Now it comes from the streets. But what we don't have is denunciation from above" (*The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997). According to Mark Krasnoselsky, since the promulgation of Presidential Decree 310 "not one extremist publication or organization has been closed down or prosecuted at the initiative of the prosecutor's office in accordance with the Law on the News Media or the RF [Russian Federation] Criminal Code" (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; see also UCSJ May 1997, 27). Krasnoselsky states that the Ministry of Justice and the Committee on the Press "have taken an extremely passive position on this question, doing virtually nothing to monitor or analyze the activity of extremist organizations and publications, and the Prosecutor General's Office has not been active as the primary organization in this context" (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997).

Evgeny Proshechkin believes that in practice anti-Semites are protected by Russia's legal system; few people are ever punished for inciting ethnically motivated hatred (3 June 1998). Proshechkin has attempted to initiate legal action against pro-fascist groups in the past and his experience has led him to believe that Russia's judicial system is not yet sufficiently operational to duly process such initiatives (ibid.). Some sources state that courts seldom punish anti-Semitic actions because the "definition of fascism is so narrow that hate-mongers can get away with the most inflammatory statements" (*The Toronto Star* 30 May 1997; see also NCSJ Feb. 1998, np). Police forces have been accused of overlooking manifestations of anti-Semitism and fascism; however, Aleksandr Osovtsov believes that although police will often formally initiate action when a victim of an anti-Semitic act lays a complaint, these investigations do not produce any actual results (3 June 1998; see also *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* 29 Aug. 1997; ITAR-TASS 9 Apr. 1998). Osovtsov explains that this is due in part to the general lack of efficiency of the Russian legal system, but it is also partly due to the presence of anti-Semitism within the system itself (3 June 1998).

According to Alexander Ossipov, regional politics serve to strengthen racism in Russia (May 1998). "Authorities of many regions consider their domains as 'states within a state'.... the goals of 'regional interests' which are above the law, usually bear a significant xenophobic element" (ibid.). Ossipov notes that Moscow and Krasnodar Krai are prime examples of this phenomena (ibid.). William Cohen states that the Russian government has failed to heed the warnings of Russian, Jewish and international human rights groups who have insisted that fascist and anti-Semitic elements have been gaining strength and momentum in the country (Cohen 4 Dec. 1997). "Unfortunately, the unimpeded growth of such anti-democratic groups has now resulted in their official control over a significant region in Southern Russia [Krasnodar]" (ibid.). Pages 15-24 of the January 1998 UCSJ publication *Report on Antisemitism, Political Extremism and Persecution of Religious Groups in Russia: April-December 1997* provide further details on allegations of state anti-Semitism and regional examples of anti-Semitic incidents.

5. IMPACT OF THE 1997 RELIGION LAW

Extended Response to Information Request RUS28246.E of 17 November 1997 provides a thorough review of the September 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, including an English translation of this law.

Judaism is included in the preamble to the religion law as one of the five traditional faiths of Russia; the UCSJ notes, however, the law's preamble does not carry any force of law (*The Moscow Times* 27 Sept. 1997; *Moskovskiye Novosti* 28 Sept.-5 Oct. 1997; *News from UCSJ* May 1998). Only the Russian Orthodox Church is given special status in the preamble (ibid.).

The religion law is reportedly primarily aimed at Christian rivals to the Russian Orthodox Church; Moscow chief rabbi Goldschmidt describes the law as "a fight between two Christian denominations" (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 1 Oct. 1997; see also NCSJ Oct. 1997). It places restrictions on religions that cannot prove that they have been active in Russia for at least 15 years (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 1 Oct. 1997; AP 7 Oct. 1997; *The Moscow Times* 27 Sept. 1997). "Faiths not registered with the state since 1982 ... must register annually for 15 years before they can proselytise, publish or invite missionaries to Russia without restrictions" (ibid.). According to the NCSJ, there is a fear among Russia's Jewish community that a future repressive government may use the law against Jews (Oct. 1997). One Russian Reform Jew was cited by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency as stating that "I know that this law is not against us Jews. But who knows how things will turn out" (1 Oct. 1997; see also NCSJ Oct. 1997).

Jewish spokespersons also fear that relatively young or newer Jewish groups may face restrictions and discrimination (*News from UCSJ* May 1998; Keston 23 Apr. 1998; *New York Times* 12 Oct. 1997). According to a Keston Institute report, "the only Jewish structures that meet a strict reading of the law's 'fifteen-year rule' are those controlled by Orthodox rabbis: Reform Judaism, for example, is a novelty in Russia. At present there are no serious conflicts between Russia's Orthodox and Reform Jews, but should any arise the law would place the latter at the mercy of the former" (23 Apr. 1998). The UCSJ reports that there are five synagogues in Russia that meet the law's fifteen-year registration rule (*News from UCSJ* May 1998). All other Russian synagogues may find themselves at the mercy of local authorities (ibid.).

In October 1997 members of a Reform synagogue in Bryansk, a city south-west of Moscow, learned that their registration had been withheld by local officials (*News from UCSJ* 30 Oct. 1997; *St. Petersburg Times* 10-16 Nov. 1997; *News from the UCSJ* May 1998). City officials cited the new religion law in their rejection of the synagogue's registration application (ibid.). The chairman of the Jewish Religious Society in Bryansk believes there was no ill intent on the part of city officials; they were simply lacking sufficient information to process the application (*St. Petersburg Times* 10-16 Nov. 1997). An official at the Bryansk justice department stated that the synagogue's application would be processed when the department received copies of several missing documents (ibid.). No further information was available as of 14 July 1998.

Further reports on restrictions placed on Jewish activities as a result of this law are not currently available to the Research Directorate.^[6]

NOTE

[6] For information on the effects of the religion law after the first six months of its existence, please see the 23 Apr. 1998 Keston News Service report *Concrete Effects of Russia's New Religion Law: An Overview*. This report is available at all

Regional Documentation Centres. [\[back\]](#)

6. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

While not specifically referring to the situation of Jews, the following reports on racial discrimination in Russia and police treatment of ethnic minorities provide contextual information that may be of interest to the reader: the February 1997 Human Rights Watch/Helsinki report entitled *Russian Federation: A Review of the Compliance of the Russian Federation with Council of Europe Commitments and Other Human Rights Obligations on the First Anniversary of its Accession to the Council of Europe* and the May 1998 report by Alexander Ossipov entitled *Racism in Russia*. Ossipov's article is available on the internet at <www.riga.lv/minelres/archive/> and the Human Rights Watch/Helsinki report is available at Regional Documentation Centres.

Information specific to internal flight alternatives for Jews is not currently available, however, Extended Response to Information Request RUS29376.EX of 27 May 1998 provides information on freedom of movement that may be relevant when analyzing the situation of Jews. Also of potential interest, Extended Response RUS29376.EX provides information on the issuance of Russia's (October 1997) new internal passports.

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